birth, who claws and scrapes himself up the ladder was given something - the strength and determination in the act of abandonment. Jesus suggested that it is a far happier thing to know that - to confess our poverty, for instance, if we were to be deprived the love and friendship of others, than to pretend as if we were self-sufficient.

But the real crisis of happiness is best understood in categories variously described as the "Me Generation" by Tom Wolfe, the New Narcissism by Christopher Lasch, or plain old "sin" by St. Paul. Happiness, according to the bottom line in our culture is doing what I want to do when I want to do it.

I was intrigued to discover that Alexis de Tocqueville observed the fatal flaw of selfishness in our culture 150 years ago. Said he: "No power on earth can prevent the increasing equality of conditions...from leading every member of the community to be wrapped up in himself. And no one can fortell into what disgrace and wretchedness they would plunge themselves lest they should have to sacrifice something of their well-being to the prosperity of their fellow creatures." (Time Magazine, 6/4/79)

Jeffrey Hadden, writing in Psychology Today recently labeled it the "Inward Generation". He wrote: "It is the generation which gives absolute priority to the personal and which tends, in a remarkable way, to withdraw into the self."

The definitive study however, was done by Christopher Lasch, The New Narcissism. Narcissus was the young man in Greek mythology who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water. Narcissism, as the word is used today, is simply the total preoccupation with the self: self-awareness, self-discovery, self-growth, self-liberation, self-affirmation, self-gratification. It is, frankly, our obsession: some would say our real religion, our latest idolatry.

Listen to Lasch describe it: "After the political turmoil of the sixties Americans have retreated to purely personal preoccupations. Having no hope for improving their lives in any of the ways that matter, people have convinced themselves that what matters is psychic self-improvement, eating health food, taking lessons in ballet or belly dancing, immersing themselves in the wisdom of the East, jogging, learning how to relate, overcoming the fear of pleasure." (The Culture of Narcissism, p. 29) — cite Robert Bellah - et. al - Habits of the Heart

We have, I am convinced, been sold a bill of goods: no matter that we have sold ourselves on the idea that gratification of the self is the prerequisite for feeling happy. Using the sophisticated new vocabularies cheerfully provided by "pop" psychology, we have been convinced that selfishness is, after all, honestly human, therefore OK. What people before us called egotism, we call self-affirmation. Suddenly conceit is really self-confidence; arrogance - self-assurance; and grabbing - grasping for life, the honest expression of one's needs.

New therapies have suggested that ideas like self-sacrifice and self-denial, sacrificial love are oppressive, dangerous to mental health, outrightly neurotic. "Hell no, we won't go!" college people are shouting, and quite apart from the relative merits of the selective service system I hear in that defiant protest at least an echo of adult middle class culture. Lasch comments: "To liberate humanity from such outmoded ideas of love and duty has become the mission of the post-Freudian therapies and particularly their current popularizers, for whom mental health means the overthrow of inhibition and the immediate gratification of every impulse." (Ibid., p. 43)

Without sounding judgmental and moralistic the Christian faith suggests today that we are quite simply, running on the wrong track - or marching to the wrong drummer - to badly mix a pair of metaphors? The trouble with us is that what we're doing isn't working. It isn't making us happy. The only thing instant gratification ever did for anyone was suggest itself as the norm. Sexual liberation, apparently, isn't making anybody happier. The research seems to indicate that an obsession with self, in sexual terms, has not turned us on so much as turned on us, as Martin Luther said it would in his famous description of sin as the self curving in on itself. New sexual freedom seems to be responsible for a considerable increase in unhappiness, frustration and sexual dysfunction. The Christian faith suggests that the greatest favor you can do for yourself is forget yourself.

One of my favorite people ~~is~~ was Joseph Sittler, ~~retired~~ former Professor of Theology at the University of Chicago. Dr. Sittler ~~is~~ was a good scholar, a man of rich humanity, who loves the arts and people and God and life, and I have learned very much from him as a young student, but now as a mature reader. On the occasion of his 75th birthday ~~last fall~~ the Christian Century interviewed him. Listen to Joe Sittler on the subject of Finding and Knowing Yourself:

"People frequently ask me how to find and know the self. Let me be quite personal. In my reflection, I have come to the surprising conclusion that I have never asked that question; it seems to be a traumatic one for many, but it has never been of concern to me. In a sense, I have been greatly blessed by having had a modest self-image as a child. I have a very smart older brother and a very beautiful older sister. I was just a third kid, and therefore I would simply open my eyes and look around and gawk and enjoy whatever there was to enjoy. By never asking who I was, I developed a self without pressing the question.

"Young people often come to me and say: 'I may drop out of school or leave this place or quit my job. I've got to go off by myself and find out who I am.' Well, I can understand the pathos of the situation and what motivates their feeling and can be patient with their convictions. At the same time, I'm very dubious as to success.

"You find that your self emerges more quickly if you do not keep scratching the question. If you lose your life, you

find it, or it could be that it will find you. You will say: 'Now that seems to be what I am, or what I'd like to do.' I don't think you go to some sterile, barren land filled with sagebrush and gaze at your navel to find out who you are." (Christian Century, 9/26/79, p. 915-916).

The Christian faith suggests that you will discover yourself by forgetting yourself for a while: that the meaning of your existence may emerge, not after a long inward journey of introspection, but in some grand task which calls you to give yourself to it.

When Victor Frankl talks about the meaning of life I listen. Frankl is an Austrian Psychiatrist, a Jew who survived Auschwitz. He has written a remarkable little book under the title The Unconscious God. Listen to a few vignettes:

"...The more one forgets oneself - giving oneself to a cause or another person - the more human he is...Happiness is the side effect of living out the self transcendence of existence...Once one has served a cause or is involved in loving another human being, happiness occurs by itself... pleasure and happiness are by - products...Happiness must ensue. It cannot be pursued." (The Unconscious God, p. 79, 84, 85)

It's risky business, obviously. To care deeply enough about something or someone to commit yourself is to risk getting hurt. To sit in a meeting and speak to a concern about which you care deeply is always to risk feeling foolish.

To hug a friend or weep for joy or clap in church or sing the National Anthem when everyone around you is standing in stoney silence - is always to risk appearing foolish. To run for office is to risk special and exquisite pain. To apply for Medical School is to risk having to deal with rejection. To run a race is to risk coming in dead last. And to give everything precious about yourself to another in love is to risk the greatest hurt of all.

Happiness seems to dictate a prudent sense of security. And the very moment we start thinking like that, the possibilities for happiness become very remote. → to conclusion

C. S. Lewis said it all. If I had opportunity to read just one paragraph to you, this would be it:

"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to be sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in the casket, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken: it will become unbreakable... The alternative to tragedy, or at least the risk of tragedy is damnation. The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love is hell." (The Four Loves)